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APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES LETTERS PATENT

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TITLE: INTEGRATED HEAT EXCHANGE
 AND FLUID CONTROL ASSEMBLY

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INTEGRATED HEAT EXCHANGE AND FLUID CONTROL DEVICE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates generally to a device for controlling the temperature of fluid in a closed-circuit system. More specifically, the invention relates to an integrated heat exchange and fluid control device for an engine, such as an automobile engine.

[0002] Automobile engines optimally operate in a known temperature range. Typically, an automobile's engine temperature is below this optimal range during engine warm-up. It is therefore desirable to cause the engine to reach its optimal temperature range as quickly as possible by not cooling the engine fluid immediately after warm-up. However, engines will eventually reach temperatures above this optimal range if left uncooled, so it is thereafter desirable to cool the engine fluid so the engine does not exceed the maximum optimal operating temperature, and is controlled within the optimal temperature range.

[0003] Additionally, engine fluid temperature control systems are typically closed-circuit systems with a constant fluid volume. Therefore, it is desirable for a fluid temperature control device to be able to quickly and accurately adjust the amount of fluid that is cooled without adjusting the overall fluid volume in the system.

[0004] Fluid temperature control devices typically control the operating temperature of engine fluid by using a bypass loop, such as a bypass circuit, that directs fluid away from the heat exchanger. Presently, bypass circuits are located, externally from the heat exchanger, either internally or externally to the engine, in order to minimize heat transfer of the fluid in the bypass circuit. However, an external fluid bypass circuit requires added components such as additional seals,

housing structures, and tubing. External bypass circuits also cause unnecessary complexities during system diagnosis and repair because the system components are dispersed throughout the internal structure of the engine. Additionally, traditional bypass circuits can reduce the efficiency of cooling system fluid fill and fluid evacuation during manufacturing and during repair.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0005] The current invention provides the integration of a heat exchange device and a fluid control device. The fluid control device permits temperature control of the fluid flowing through a system by diverting the fluid flow into different conduits, a heat transfer conduit and a bypass conduit. The different conduits effectuate different degrees of heat transfer to control the overall temperature of the fluid passed to the engine. In order to more effectively prevent heat transfer of fluid in the bypass conduit, thereby giving the system more control over the temperature of the fluid, the bypass conduit may be adjacent to a static blocking shield; it may be adjacent to a dynamic blocking shield; it may have a larger cross-sectional area than the heat transfer conduits; or it may have other appropriate modifications. Additionally, the invention may include a device or devices, such as baffle(s), used to maintain separation of the fluids after they have been diverted into different conduits.

[0006] In order to divert the fluid into the conduits, the invention preferably incorporates a valve assembly and a control system for the valve assembly. The valve assembly may also be able to divert fluid into a secondary circuit, such as a heater circuit. The control system preferably includes an input device for measuring a system parameter, such as fluid temperature; and also includes an output device

for controlling the position of the valve assembly. The control system may include an automated control system and/or a manual control system.

[0007] The integration of the heat exchange device and the fluid control device provides fluid temperature control, while enabling reduction of the complexity in the system external to the integrated devices, improving ease of access to the integrated device after installation, and improving fluid control response time.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] Figure 1 is a block diagram showing coolant flow through an engine circuit including an integrated radiator and coolant control device of the present invention;

[0009] Figure 2 is a plan view of the rear face of an integrated heat exchange and fluid control device of the present invention;

[0010] Figure 3A is a cross-sectional view of a header of the device, generally taken along the line A-A in Figure 2;

[0011] Figure 3B is a partial cut view of the bypass conduit and heat exchange conduits, generally taken along the line B-B in Figure 2;

[0012] Figure 3C is a partial cross-sectional view of the inlet tank, generally taken along the line C-C in Figure 2;

[0013] Figure 4A is a perspective view of the inlet body of the coolant control device in the present invention;

[0014] Figure 4B is a perspective view of the rotatable element of the coolant control device in the present invention;

[0015] Figure 4C is a perspective view of the inlet body of Figure 4A assembled with the rotatable element of Figure 4B;

[0016] Figure 5 is a cross-sectional view of the outlet tank, generally taken along the line D-D in Figure 2; and

[0017] Figure 6 is a perspective view showing the front face of an integrated radiator and coolant control device of the present invention that includes a dynamic blocking shield.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0018] Referring to Figures 1 and 2, one application of the present invention is in an engine cooling circuit 8, where a cooling fluid flows from a pump 102 into an engine 100 along a line 114. The fluid is preferably a common liquid coolant 21 (designated in Figure 3A) such as ethylene glycol, but other appropriate fluids may be used. In the engine 100, the liquid coolant 21 typically absorbs energy and therefore becomes heated. From the engine 100, the liquid coolant 21 next flows through a line 112 to the integrated heat exchange and fluid control (integrated radiator) assembly 10 which includes a coolant control valve 105 and a radiator 107. Once entering the integrated radiator 10, all, none, or some of the liquid coolant 21 flows into the heat exchange section 20 to undergo substantial heat transfer and all, none, or some of the liquid coolant 21 flows into a bypass section 19 and undergoes substantially no heat transfer. Some of the liquid coolant 21 may be diverted away from the integrated radiator assembly 10 to an optional heater core 104 along circuit heater to heat the air passing into the passenger compartment of the vehicle. From the integrated radiator assembly 10 and/or heater core 104, the liquid coolant 21 flows back into the pump 102 and the cycle repeats. The current invention is preferably used in a closed-circuit cycle, as shown in Figure 1.

[0019] One embodiment of the integrated radiator assembly 10 is shown in Figure 2. This embodiment includes a radiator core 13 having the bypass section 19 and the heat exchange section 20 mentioned above. The integrated radiator assembly 10 further includes an inlet tank 14 and an outlet tank 22 located on opposing sides of the radiator core 13 and in fluid communication therewith. To provide coolant 21 to the inlet tank 14, an inlet section 15 for receiving liquid coolant 21 from the engine 100 via line 112 is coupled via an inlet connector 12. As further discussed below, the inlet section 15 is configured to divert the coolant 21 as required to the various sections of the radiator core 13 (as briefly discussed above). In other words, the inlet section 15 is configured to control the volume of coolant flow through the bypass section 19 (the bypass flow 21a) and the heat exchange section 20 (the heat exchange flow 21b). After passing through the radiator core 13, the coolant 21 is received in the outlet tank 22 and discharged via outlet 24 back to the pump 102.

[0020] The details of the inlet section 15 will first be discussed.

[0021] As shown in Figure 4A, the inlet section 15 preferably includes an inlet body 46 for receiving a rotatable element 64. The inlet body 46 includes an inlet port 26 that receives fluid from the inlet connector 12 and first and second ports 48 and 50. The first port 48 is a heat exchange port in fluid communication with the heat exchange conduits 16, and the second port 50 is a bypass port in fluid communication with the bypass conduit 18. In an alternative construction, the inlet body 46 may include a third port 52, which is a heater port in fluid communication with a heater core 104.

[0022] As shown in Figure 4B, the rotatable element 64 includes an inlet 62, a first opening 58 for connecting with the heat exchange section 20, and a second opening 60 for connecting with the bypass section 19. The rotatable element 64 may also include a third opening 66 for connecting to the heat circuit 110.

[0023] The inlet 62 of the rotatable element 64 is positioned with respect to the inlet port 26 of the inlet body 46 so as to form an inlet opening 63. The inlet opening 63 may be a variable opening of varying size and/or shape as the rotatable element 64 rotates relative to the inlet body 46. Alternatively, the inlet opening 63 may be a fixed opening, with a constant size regardless of the rotatable element 64 position.

[0024] The three openings 58, 60, and 66 of the rotatable element 64 are positioned with respect to the three ports 48, 50, and 52 of the inlet body 46 so as to be able to be moved into partially or fully overlapping positions and form variable openings 49, 51, and 53 of varying size and/or shape as the rotatable element 64 rotates relative to the inlet body 46. Accordingly, the first variable opening 49 is defined by the first port 48 and the first opening 58, and it fluidly connects the inlet section 15 with the heat exchange section 20. The second variable opening 51 is defined by the second port 50 and the second opening 60, and it fluidly connects the inlet section 15 with the bypass section 19. The optional third variable opening 53 is defined by the third port 52 and the third opening 66, and it fluidly connects the inlet section 15 with the heater circuit 110. Alternatively, any of these three aforementioned variable openings 49, 51, and 53 may be configured so as to have a constant cross-sectional area as the rotatable element 64 rotates relative to the inlet body 46. In a preferred embodiment, some or all of the variable openings 49, 51,

and 53 may also be closed in certain orientations of the rotatable element 64 relative to the inlet body 46, preventing all fluid from flowing through any of the openings 49, 51, and 53.

[0025] The rotatable element 64 is preferably controlled by an automated control mechanism, such as the motor 122 shown in Figure 2. A sensor 120, preferably located between the engine 100 and the integrated radiator assembly 10, measures a system parameter, such as the temperature of the liquid coolant 21 or the temperature of an engine cylinder head (not shown). A controller 124 compares the measured system parameter with an optimal system parameter and generates an error value. The controller 124, then activates the motor 122 in response to the error value, and the motor 122 rotates the rotatable element 64. An assembly cap 88 is received onto input section 15 and covers the rotatable element 64.

[0026] The rotatable element 64 may also be controlled by a manual control mechanism, such as a torque member 80. The torque member 80 is connected to the rotatable element 64 and it extends through the top of the assembly cap 88. The torque member 80 is configured to receive a rotational torque force from a tool such as a torque wrench (not shown), causing the rotatable element 64 to rotate. The torque member 80 preferably has a hexagon-shaped cross-section in order to receive the torque wrench. The torque member 80 permits manual adjustment of the rotatable element 64 during operation, assembly, and service.

[0027] A valve actuator (not shown), such as a spring mechanism, causes the rotatable element 64 to automatically rotate to a design position whenever there is a loss of power or loss of communication with the sensor 120. The design position is preferably the position where the variable openings 49, 51, 53, and 63 have

maximized cross-sectional areas respectively. Such a design position is advantageous during operation because it provides a level of functionality during a system failure and because it allows the engine system 8 to be filled with liquid coolant 21 quickly during assembly and service fill operations.

[0028] Once the liquid coolant 21 travels through one of the first and second variable openings 49 and 51, it flows into the inlet tank 14. Alternatively, the flow is directed into the heater circuit 110.

[0029] A baffle 70 separates the inlet tank 14 into an upper inlet tank section 28 and a lower inlet tank section 29, which are respectively coupled to the bypass flow opening 74 and the radiator flow opening 72 which prevent mixing between the bypass fluid flow 21a and the heat exchange fluid flow 21b.

[0030] The inlet tank 14 mates with a header 38 (seen in Figure 1) that provides a fluid connection between the inlet tank 14 and the heat exchange conduits 16 and the bypass conduit 18. A gasket, adhesive, or metal bond provided between the inlet tank 14 and header 38 forms a fluid tight seal between the two components. As shown in Figure 3A, the bypass conduit 18 and the heat exchange conduits 16 are connected to openings 42 and 40 in the header 38 at one end of the conduits 16, 18. Similar to the inlet tank 14 and corresponding thereto, a baffle seat 36 is provided in a corresponding position to the baffle 70 and prevents the mixture of fluid bypass flow 21a with the heat exchange fluid flow 21b.

[0031] The heat transfer conduits 16 of the heat exchange section 20 are exposed to airflow 32 perpendicular to the direction through the conduits 16. In this type of heat exchanger, the airflow 32 is preferably cooler than the heat exchange fluid flow 21b, causing the heat exchange fluid flow 21b to be cooled by the airflow

32. The heat exchange fluid flow 21b preferably undergoes a substantial heat transfer process with the airflow 32 such that the airflow 32 substantially cools the heat exchange fluid flow 21b.

[0032] The bypass conduit 18 is preferably located along either the top 13a or the bottom 13b of the radiator core 13. However, the bypass conduit 18 may be located in other appropriate configurations. Preferably, the bypass conduit 18 is a conduit with a cross-sectional area 17a equal to or greater than the cross-sectional area 17b of the heat exchange conduits 16 in order to minimize pressure drop across the bypass conduit 18. However, the bypass conduit 18 may be any other suitable size. For ease of manufacturing, it may be advantageous to use a conduit with the same dimensions as the heat exchange conduits 16. Also, it may be advantageous to include a plurality of conduits to serve as bypass conduits, with the number of conduits dependent on the cross-sectional area and the fluid flow capacity requirements of coolant system 8.

[0033] The bypass fluid flow 21a is not intended to undergo a substantial heat transfer process, and thus the temperature of the bypass flow 21a stays relatively constant as it flows through the integrated radiator 10. To achieve this, a blocking shield 30 is preferably coupled with the bypass conduit 18 and positioned with respect to the airflow 32 to substantially limit or prevent heat transfer between the bypass fluid flow 21a and the airflow 32. In an airflow-type heat exchanger, as shown in Figure 3B, the blocking shield 30 is positioned with respect to the bypass conduit 18 to substantially block airflow 32 around the bypass conduits 18 and this substantially prevents heat transfer between the bypass fluid 21a and the airflow 32.

The blocking shield 30 is especially advantageous where the bypass conduit 18 includes fins (not shown) to add structural support to the bypass conduit 18.

[0034] In another embodiment of the present invention, as shown in Figure 6, a dynamic blocking shield 31, such as a pivotable blocking shield, is coupled with the bypass conduits 18 such as to control the exposure of the bypass conduit 18 to the airflow 32. In this embodiment, the bypass conduit 18 will permit a degree of heat transfer between the bypass fluid flow 21a and the airflow 32, depending on the position of the dynamic blocking shield 31. The angle of the dynamic blocking shield 31 is preferably controlled by a control system (not shown) that measures a system parameter such as fluid temperature and adjusts the angle of the dynamic blocking shield 31 in response to the measurement. The control system may include the sensor 120 mentioned above or it may include an additional sensor (not shown). A dynamic mechanism, such as an actuator 33, controls the position of the dynamic blocking shield 31.

[0035] Both the heat exchange conduits 16 and the bypass conduit 18 are connected to an outlet section 25 such that bypass fluid flow 21a and the heat exchange fluid flow 21b flow into the outlet section 25 from the respective conduits 16, 18. As shown, the outlet section 25 preferably includes an outlet tank 22 for receiving the liquid coolant 21 and an outlet 24 for dispensing the liquid coolant 21 from the outlet tank 22. The outlet tank 22 preferably includes outlet baffles 92 that keep separate the bypass flow 21a from the heat exchange flow 21b. The outlet baffles 92 are preferably located along the top and/or side 96 of the outlet tank 22 in order to substantially separate the outlet tank 22 into a first section 91, which is coupled with the heat exchange conduits 16, and a second section 93, which is

coupled with the bypass conduit 18, in order to minimize mixing between the bypass flow 21a and the heat exchange flow 21b until the fluid flowing through the bypass section 19 flows past the outlet baffle edge 90 and reaches the outlet 24.

[0036] In another embodiment of the present invention, not shown, the airflow is replaced with a second liquid and the heat exchange section may include parallel plates forming a plurality of conduits for the second liquid. The conduits are adjacent to each other and separated by the plates such that the flowing liquids undergo heat exchange through the plates. A blocking shield in this embodiment is preferably located proximal to an appropriate plate defining a conduit in order to insulate the plate and minimize the heat exchange through the plate. Another embodiment of this invention is a dynamic blocking shield capable of adjusting the area of a conduit that is insulated from the other shield.

[0037] In another embodiment of the present invention, not shown, the coolant control valve 105 is located proximal to the outlet tank 22. In this embodiment, the coolant control valve 105 controls the volume of liquid coolant 21 flowing through the bypass section 19 and through the heat exchange section 18 by controlling the amount of liquid coolant 21 exiting the respective sections 18, 19. More specifically, the bypass conduit 18 and the heat exchange conduits 16 will become saturated with liquid coolant 21, and liquid coolant 21 at the inlet section 15 will be unable to enter the bypass conduit 18 and the heat exchange conduits 16 until the coolant control valve 105 permits the liquid coolant 21 to flow into the outlet tank 22.

[0038] The foregoing disclosure is the best mode devised by the inventors for practicing the invention. Inasmuch as the foregoing disclosure is intended to enable

one skilled in the pertinent art to practice the instant invention, it should not be construed to be limited thereby but rather should be construed to include such aforementioned obvious variations and be limited only by the spirit and scope of the following claims.